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## CORRESPONDENCE.

THE ETYMOLOGY OF *bicched bones*.

To the Editors of *Mod. Lang. Notes*.

SIRS:—A passage in the *Speculum Morale* seems to settle beyond doubt the vexed question as to the etymology of “bicched,” which occurs most frequently in the phrase “bicched bones” (see Mätzner and the *New English Dictionary* for citations). The author of the *Speculum*, inveighing against the dicer, declares: “Item est contemptor sacrorum temporum, id est festorum, quae violat et expendit in blasphemiiis dei et sanctorum, et vituperiis eorum. Contemnit eos contumelias eas inferendo: plus defert honoris *tribus ossibus caninis*, id est *deciis*, quam ossibus dei et sanctorum quos dinumerat blasphemando. Ps. [22: 16]: ‘Foderunt manus meas et pedes meos; dinumeraverunt omnia ossa mea.’ . . . Ipse *tribus ossibus caninis* obedit, id est *deciis*, et colit ea pro deo” (*Lib. III, Pars VIII, Dist. iiii*, “De ludis inhonestis”). In both instances the author, by adding the explanatory *id est deciis*, makes it impossible to misunderstand his reference to the “dogs’ bones.” In the preceding *Distinctio*, “De frequentatione tabernarum,” the *ossa canina* are also mentioned: ‘Ibi lusoires adorant *ossa canina* pro deo, scilicet taxillos.’

These lines from the *Speculum Morale* establish the use of *ossa canina* as a contemptuous term for dice, and thus give us an exact Latin equivalent for “bicched bones.” The suggested etymology of “bicched” through the Dutch “bikkel” becomes, therefore, not only dubious but positively untenable.

The formation of the adjective “bicched” from a substantive instead of from a verb is, according to the editors of the *New Eng. Dict.*, “not easily explained.” But why is it not entirely parallel to “doggyd,” which in the *Prompt. Parv.* is glossed *caninus*? Other examples of adjectives formed by adding “the weak participial ending to substantives are: “crabbyd” (*Prompt. Parv.*, glossed *cancerinus*; *Cursor M.*, 8943), “craggyd” (*Cov. Mysteries*, p. 384), “ragged” (*King Alys.*, v. 684; *Piers Plow.*, B xi, 33), and “wreched” (Chaucer, *Fortune*, v. 25, *Cant. T.*, v. 13,962). A long list of similar formations, no

doubt, could be compiled. These will show, however, that the case of “bicched” is not exceptional.

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## THE EYES AS GENERATORS OF LOVE.

To the Editors of *Mod. Lang. Notes*.

SIRS:—In looking over the last numbers of your journal, I find in your issue of November, under the above title, a query in regard to the provenance of the idea of the eyes as generators of love so frequently met with in poetry. After referring to some medieval authors who profess this theory, the article says: “It is a typical case of the itinerary of ideas—from France or Provence to Italy, thence perhaps to England—there are some gaps in the course.” In view of this statement, one may be permitted to recall some examples familiar from classical antiquity as well as from English authors previous to Shakespeare:

Diog. 4, 49 has the oft-quoted proverbial saying: *Ἐκ τῶν γὰρ ἑσσοῶν γίγνεται ἀνθρώποις ἐρᾶν* (cf. also Agath. fr. 29, 768). Theocritus, II, 82, sings:

*χὼς ἔδον, ὡς ἐμάρην, ὥς μοι περὶ θυμὸς λάβη,*

a passage reproduced in Vergil’s more familiar line (*Eclogues*, VIII, 41),

*Ut vidi, ut perii, ut me malus abstulit error!*

Cf. also Moschos, 2, 74: *ὥς μιν φράσαθ’ ὡς ἐόλητο θυμὸν*. Ovid, *Metam.* 5, 395, says:

*Poenae simul visa est dilectaque raptaque Diti;*

and *ibid.*, 6, 455:

*Non secus exarsit conspecta virgine Tereus,*

a passage which reëchoes—and this transports us to England—in John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, 5, 5621–2 (cf. Macaulay, II, p. 504):

*And with the sighte he gan desire,  
And sette his oghne herte on fyre.*

Cf. also *ibid.*, 1, ll. 319–324.

In his *Balades*, no. xxiii, ll. 1–4 (ed. Macaulay, *French Works*, p. 356), Gower gives expression to this traditional theory in a form which is a commonplace in lyric poetry: